Chapter 2
Purpose and Need

What is the I-405 Corridor Program and how does the Renton Nickel Improvement Project relate to it?

In 2002, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) prepared an environmental impact statement (EIS). This EIS reviewed a range of alternatives for improving I-405 on a corridor-wide basis. As a result, WSDOT selected an alternative that is now known as the I-405 Corridor Program.

WSDOT created the I-405 Corridor Program as a comprehensive strategy to reduce congestion and improve mobility throughout the I-405 corridor. The corridor begins at the I-405/I-5 interchange in the city of Tukwila and extends northward 30 miles to the I-405/I-5 interchange in the city of Lynnwood. The program's purpose is to provide an efficient, integrated, and multimodal system of transportation solutions that:

- Maintains or enhances livable communities within the corridor.
- Maintains or improves air quality, protects or enhances fish-bearing streams, and promotes regional environmental values such as continued integrity of the natural environment.
- Supports a vigorous state and regional economy by responding to existing and future travel needs.
- Accommodates planned regional growth.

As part of the I-405 Corridor Program, the Renton Nickel Improvement Project proposes a focused strategy to improve I-405 between I-5 in Tukwila and SR 169 in Renton, and SR 167 southbound from I-405 to SW 41st Street. Exhibit 2-1 shows the entire I-405 corridor including the area covered by this project. In general, the area that was studied for this environmental assessment (EA) is the highway corridor for the road sections described above and an area approximately one mile wide encompassing these highway sections.

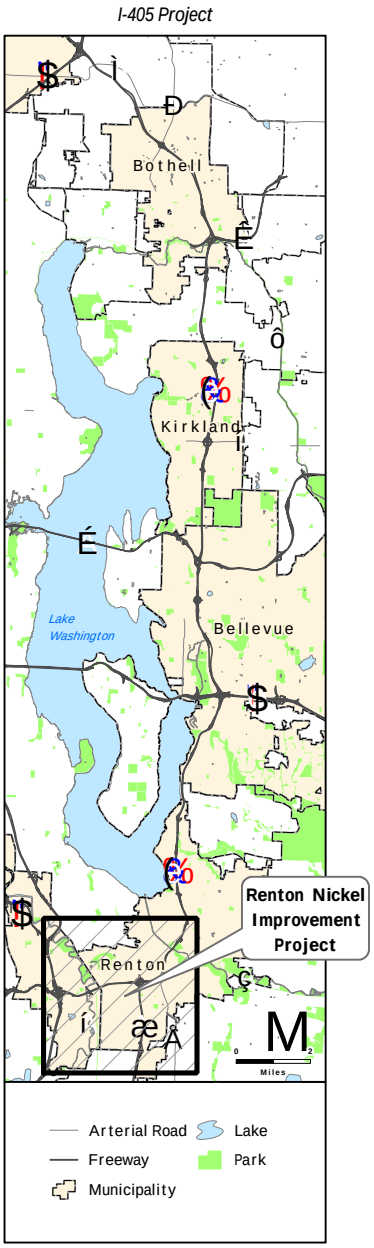

Exhibit 2-1. I-405 Corridor and Renton Nickel Improvement Project Study Area

Why do we need the Renton Nickel Improvement Project?

Traffic congestion on I-405 between I-5 and SR 169 is high, averaging 127,000 vehicles daily. Northbound I-405 carries the highest volumes in the study area between SR 167 and

Congestion on I-405 during the morning peak hour at the SR 169 interchange

SR 169. Travel speeds drop down to an average of 30 mph during the morning and evening commutes.

Safety is also a concern because accidents are more frequent within the study area than along the rest of the I-405 corridor. WSDOT has identified four high accident locations in the study area:

- The intersection on Interurban Avenue (SR 181) where the southbound I-405 off-ramp ends
- The I-405 southbound off-ramp to Interurban Avenue (SR 181)
- The intersection on Interurban Avenue (SR 181) where the northbound off-ramp ends
- The interchange-ramp from southbound I-405 to SR 167

The safety concerns at these locations are all related to congestion.

What happens if the Renton Nickel Improvement Project is not built?

Traffic in the region is predicted to continue to increase in the future. Without the Renton Nickel Improvement Project, I-405 capacity will become increasingly inadequate to meet the traffic demand. With more people using the freeway, the morning and evening commutes will become slower for even longer periods of time, and the frequency of accidents will continue to be high.

What other improvements are being implemented as part of the Puget Sound Region's transportation planning process?

The Renton Nickel Improvement Project is one of several I-405 projects. Other projects along the I-405 corridor include the Kirkland Nickel Project, the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project, the Renton to Bellevue Improvement Project, and others. In addition to improvements along I-405 and SR 167, WSDOT has planned projects on SR 520, I-90, and SR 522 as recorded in WSDOT's 2004 Highway System Plan. This plan forecasts transportation needs for the next 20 years. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan for the Central Puget Sound Region, Destination 2030, revised in 2003, defines the region's action plan for the next 30 years.

The Corridor EIS also identified possibilities to better manage the corridor through tolling. WSDOT could achieve this through the use of High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes so that HOVs and transit could use the lane for free and other vehicles would pay a toll to use the lane. HOT lanes could be created through the conversion of the HOV lane and possibly convert one of the new lanes proposed by this project. The footprint identified in this document would not preclude implementation of HOT lanes. The freeway system would, however, operate differently if HOT lanes are used. If HOT lanes are to be implemented in the future, additional operational analysis and any necessary environmental documentation would be prepared. An operational change to HOT lanes in the Renton Nickel Improvement Project area would be a future decision.

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